

Manhattan Area Technical College

Commencement Address

May 15, 2010

President Edleston, board of directors, faculty and staff, parents and graduates, thank you for the invitation to join you today. To the class of 2010: congratulations on your outstanding achievement.

I want to thank the moms and dads with us today who have sacrificed to make this day possible. When your son or daughter graduates from college, it's a wonderful day for your family. If you ask these students who had the most influence on their lives, I bet not one would say "my Congressman." Most likely they would say their parents. Few things in life are more important than our jobs as moms and dads. Parents, thank you for all you have done to help your sons and daughters reach this point in their lives. As your son or daughter enters a new chapter in their lives, you can take pride in knowing you have helped them take an important step forward. I know the graduates join me in thanking you for your love and support.

I also want to thank the members of the faculty. The Technical College is fortunate to have an excellent faculty, who make an impact on students' lives forever – educators who work hard to prepare their students for a successful career and instill in them a love for learning. Your decision to invest in the lives of young people is an honorable one, and I thank you for it. There is no more important, no more noble profession than teaching.

Addressing a class of graduates is a difficult task. It's not always easy to tell people how to live or give them a recipe for guaranteed success. I suppose, in an attempt to make me feel better, people have told me not to worry, because "hardly anyone will be listening and or remember what you said." I'm not sure if that was supposed to be encouraging, but I guess it does make me feel a little better.

Graduates: for some of you, this graduation day has been a long time in coming. Many of you have responsibilities beyond school, such as jobs and families to care for, and after today, you will be returning to those jobs full time. Others here are continuing your studies at another one of Kansas's excellent colleges. And this evening, some of you are fulfilling the dreams of many generations in your family by becoming the first person to graduate from college. I'd like to congratulate all of you on a job well done.

Your education here at the Technical College has undoubtedly prepared you well for a new career or enhanced your current skill set. Since 1965, the Technical College has earned a reputation for excellence in providing career training and continuing education for Kansans. In today's economy, jobs are requiring more and more technical skills, so having the right education and training is essential to be competitive. Whether you join the Kansas workforce today as an automotive technician, a nurse or computer technician - just to name a few - you will soon discover the importance of your education. Your training has helped you "learn a living" and prepared you for a successful future. Not only will you be able to better provide for yourself and your family, but you will also be part of the solution to our changing Kansas

economy.

Graduates, for the next few minutes, I'd like to visit with you about the road ahead and the choices that lay before you. Whether you are starting a new career or headed back to your current job, you will face many decisions over the next few years. As you weigh these decisions, I want to challenge you to become a person of excellence and character who strives to put others first.

First, commit yourself to becoming a person of excellence in whatever you do, big and small. There is a difference between excellence and perfection. Things will not always turn out to be perfect and that's ok. Perfection has to do with the end product, but excellence has to do with the process. Becoming a person of excellence means you make the most of your God-given talents and abilities.

In high school, I worked part-time with a crew of students to help the school custodian, Scotty Reidel. Scotty made sure that no matter how long it took, our school buildings and athletic fields would be well cared for – down to every last detail. Mopping the floor may not seem like a big deal, but Scotty taught us to do our best in everything, no matter how small the task. So I challenge you follow the same approach and become a person of excellence in all that you do.

Second, commit yourself to becoming a person of character. Your character in life is shaped by the principles you choose to follow. Honesty, integrity and personal responsibility—are just a

few that you should strive to follow as you build your character.

The “right” thing to do is not always the most popular thing to do in today’s world. You will be faced with many difficult choices in life and many of them will test you and your character. But if we are to live meaningful lives and have any hope of addressing today’s problems, we must remember that there is a difference between right and wrong. Integrity matters, so I challenge you to become a person of character.

And lastly, commit yourself to serving others. I am convinced that success is not measured by what you get out of life, but by what you give back. We are often told that our country is in need of great leaders. But I believe that what we really need are great servants—people who serve others, not themselves. We need people like your parents and your teachers who often put your needs first and their needs second. I believe that individuals who volunteer their time in churches, neighborhoods and communities can often have the greatest impact and change lives for the better.

I witnessed an incredible example of service in the city of Greensburg, Kansas just a few years ago. In 2007, the town was destroyed by the most powerful tornado to hit the U.S. in eight years. The tornado leveled the entire community, claimed 11 lives and left hundreds homeless. In those difficult times, I saw the best in people. When I walked through Greensburg in the days after the storm, what stood out to me was the outpouring of concern shown by the citizens of Greensburg, by Kansans and by other Americans. Rescue crews, volunteers and donations from nearby towns flowed into Greensburg. In the neighboring community of Haviland, many residents came to buy groceries and when the store owner asked, “Where are you from?” and

the answer was Greensburg, the shopkeeper responded “No charge.” In Kansas, we help our neighbors by serving one another in good times and hard times.

As a wise teacher one said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” By helping others, your own lives will be more blessed.

Graduates, in life, each of us has a higher calling. Not just to make a dollar, but to make a difference. Not just to find happiness, but to fulfill a purpose. Remember that no job, regardless of the salary or perks, can take the place of a life committed to a purpose greater than yourself. True success is not marked by your achievements, but by the kind of person you become. And I challenge you to become a person of excellence and character who strives to put others first. I challenge you to make a difference with your life.

I’m sure many of you here today have high hopes and big dreams for your future. You are probably eager to jump into the “real world” and start building your career.

Let me tell you a bit about my own experience in life. There is nothing in my background that would suggest that I would grow up to become a Congressman---no financial or political heritage in my family. My Dad worked in the oil fields of Western Kansas and my Mom was the lady you paid your electric bill to in my small hometown. I am a first generation college graduate that happened to find politics and government interesting. So I set a goal of becoming a member of the United States House of Representatives. With the help of many people, I

succeeded in reaching that goal thirteen years ago.

Being elected to Congress was something I really wanted and a sense of great satisfaction should have followed my election. Despite my electoral success, something was missing. When we set goals for ourselves, even when that goal is met, we are often left feeling empty and unsatisfied. That's because true fulfillment in life doesn't come with greater success; it comes when you live your life devoted to a greater purpose than yourself. I came to understand that I was not elected to office to meet my own personal goal, but to be of service to others.

I want to share a quote with you I heard recently: My fear for you in your life is not that you will fail – but that you will succeed in the things that ultimately don't really matter. Graduates, remember that what really matters is how you spend your life and what kind of person you become.

The world is a large and wonderful place and it is your moment to step into it. Many opportunities will come your way and regardless of where life takes you – remember where you came from. The way may be uncertain, but you can step forward with confidence as you become a person of excellence and character who impacts the lives of those around you for the better.

Our small voice tells God, "I don't know where we are going."

And God answers: "We are going forward, into the future I have shaped for you."

"But I don't know where that is"

And God answers: "I do; let's go."

"But I am afraid"

And God says: "Of course you are. Any sensible person would be. Let's go."

And we say, "But can I do all that is given me to do?"

And God says: "I have made you, I am with you to the end. Take my hand. Let's go."

Congratulations and best wishes to the Class of 2010. As you graduate today, "may the Lord bless you and keep you" and may the "Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you."

